



Exterior Home Design Elements that Work Together

Stylish solutions that combine materials, colors and textures to complete a home's look

July 2012

Benefits of a *Designed Exterior* home

This white paper, sponsored by Ply Gem, discusses the benefits and strategies of creating a *Designed Exterior* home, such as:

- Providing a custom, stylized look by incorporating stone veneer, vinyl siding, windows and other accents
- Cost savings from using products that are intended to complement each other
- The green/sustainable advantages a *Designed Exterior* offers

With a seemingly endless array of colors and home accents available, homeowners who are either building a brand new home or remodeling their current property may wonder, “Where should I start?”

Choosing items that will complement each other can be a daunting task. However, while there are a number of design options to choose from, there's no need to panic. Breaking the design process down into steps and getting help from resource guides, online tools and other resources can help you achieve a home exterior design you'll love.

Choosing your home's structure

The first step in building a new house—or renovating your existing home—is to select a style. Start by choosing an architectural style that will best fit your neighborhood.

Homes can be built in many different old and new world styles, including:

- **Cabin**
With its stone, shingle-style and Board-and-Batten siding, the cabin home style calls a lodge-style vacation destination to mind and creates a sense of “getting away from it all.” The cabin style was inspired by the rugged homes of the Old West and features heavy timbers and gable braces. To highlight natural lighting and outdoor views, cabin homes also often feature a broad use of windows.
- **Shingle**
Shingle home decorative elements include stone veneer on the first story of the home's exterior and cedar hand-split shakes on the second floor. Combining stone, siding, shakes and shutters helps to provide a strong outline; this easy-going, informal style also often includes a weathered, rustic color scheme.
- **Prairie**
Built from through approximately the 1950s, the prairie style was popular in the Midwest, thanks to Chicago-area architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who helped popularize the style.

The horizontal prairie style echoes the flat landscape it's named after. Low-pitched roofs, wide overhanging eaves, square porch supports and rows of casement windows are paired with a foundation and supports that are typically made of brick.



This cabin-style home features river rock, dark windows and red shake for a pleasing design.

- **Bungalow**
An authentic Bungalow-style home features a very modest, efficient use of space and multiple windows. Often, bungalows are not tall buildings—typically they're just one- or one-and-a half stories in height. They often also include low-pitched shingle roofs. To emphasize the warm, Midwestern style of this look, bungalows sometimes also feature a welcoming front porch.

- **Georgian**

The Georgian architectural style evolved from the style of colonial townhouses built along the Eastern seaboard and became popular in the early 1930s. Featuring a symmetrical design, the Georgian style involves double-hung windows that are aligned both horizontally and vertically. The style also often includes use of brick veneer and Dutch Lap.

- **Low Country**

This style—which was essentially a blend of the classical, French and colonial styles that evolved over time—was first seen in coastal areas.

Like the classical, French and colonial styles, low country homes often feature sloping front porches with columns that are designed to extend the inside space of the home outdoors. Low country homes also sometimes include a deeply pitched main roof and double hung and 6-over-6 pattern shuttered windows.

- **Craftsman**

Elements of a craftsman-style home include a roof with overhanging eaves and decorative under-gable braces and large porch columns supported by stone piers. This home first appeared in California at the turn of the 20th century and spread in popularity across the U.S. through pattern books.

- **Victorian**

Victorian styles include different varieties such as the Queen Anne, Gothic and Romanesque style. This look can be found on older, 19th century homes, but is often also used on newer homes to give them a vintage, regal appearance.

Frequently, Victorian homes have ornate porches and trim—and an often asymmetrical roof, which may include a front gable or large tower. You may also find brackets and spindle work, textured shingles and exteriors, including Dutch lap siding, and a sprawling front porch.



Craftsman-style details include large porch columns.

- **Spanish Eclectic**

Most commonly found in the Southwest, these homes have a sense of Spanish flair—such as rounded windows and arched entryways. Stucco is a common exterior material used in Spanish eclectic-style homes. The style also includes tile roofs and prominent arches, as well as matching shutters and a Mission-style door.

- **Beach**

Expect to find a large, wrap-around porch, extensive use of 2-over-2 windows to maximize ocean views and raised main floor with this style of home. Beach homes are designed to reflect the casual, fun-loving lifestyle of living by the sea. They often also feature shingle-style siding and whimsical louvered shutters.



A beach-style home includes a large porch and a raised main floor.

- **French Country**

For a style that was inspired by the chateaus and farm houses of southern France, it's no surprise that this contemporary take on French countryside living includes both comfort and elegance. Typical elements of a French country home include arched windows and doors, cut cobblestone and board-and-batten siding.

- **Mid-Century Modern**

Influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, this style grew in popularity in California and typically includes a post-and-beam aesthetic, low-pitched roofs and extensive use of glass. Mid-century modern homes often do not include extensive ornamentation; instead, they make use of wide roof eaves with exposed beams, large expanses of picture windows and other design elements.

- **Colonial**

This style dates back to America's founding; you'll often see early American historical homes that include its strong, straight lines and other elements taken from the stately European homes settlers left to start a new life in the U.S. There are many different styles, including the New England, Southern, Cape Cod and Dutch Colonial style. Common design elements include decorative crown molding above the front door, with pillars placed on either side of the door, and framed and paneled windows. A small porch may also be placed in front of the home.

- **Modern**

Typically two siding styles, and a brick veneer, accentuate the clean lines of the modern home. This style also often features a geometric - shaped roof. Modern homes often have a very strong emphasis on vertical design, which is highlighted by their use of tall fixed windows and board-and-batten siding.

*“It’s important to keep
in mind that not all
exterior materials are
created equal.
Incorporating
materials that require
minimal maintenance
can have several
positive benefits ...”*

- **Tuscan**

Old-world style meets modern living in this home style; the primary cladding is typically Fieldstone, with stucco used on the second story. The home’s warm appearance is due, in part, to its use of colonial brick lintels over tall windows and board-and-batten shutters.

- **Post-Modern**

Post-modern homes use shapes and angles in unexpected ways. This home style also often includes organic-looking colors and materials and an innovative approach to design; nothing is off-limits when it comes to layout.

- **Tudor**

The Tudor style stems from the English Revival period. Homes often include steeply pitched roofs and trimmed gables, four-over-one windows that are tall, narrow and grouped in multiple formations and a combination of brick, stone and occasionally stucco cladding. The half-timbering often features a decorative brick infill.

Considerations when remodeling a home

Whether you’re updating elements for increased efficiency or another functional purpose—or simply making aesthetic changes—consider implementing low-maintenance materials during your upgrade.

It’s important to keep in mind that not all exterior materials are created equal.

Incorporating materials that require minimal maintenance can have several positive benefits, including decreasing the amount of work you need to do on your home in the future.

Reducing repairs. Stucco, for example, is a fairly expensive exterior material to install; in addition, it tends to crack and deteriorate over time. Without regular maintenance, stucco may deteriorate more quickly, according to the National Park Service.

Wood, another popular home exterior choice, also requires regular upkeep. Every few years, homes with wood exteriors will likely need to be inspected for termite or other damage caused by the environment and then repainted, stained or otherwise treated to keep the home looking fresh. Painting a home can be a lengthy chore; however, if ignored, a home with peeling or chipping paint is at risk of developing additional structural damages.

Cutting down cleaning costs—and risks

When choosing your home exterior, appearance is clearly a consideration—but don't forget to factor in upkeep expenses.

Different types of cladding material require vastly different maintenance methods.

Wood, for example, requires a significant amount of upkeep. Use it in a log cabin, and you may find you need to stain, repaint or treat your home exterior every few years. In addition, wood is also often at risk for termite damage and rot.

Log siding, on the other hand—which resembles real wood, but can be made from more durable materials like vinyl or steel—offers the look and feel of a log cabin but only needs an occasional hose-down. Owners also don't typically need to recaulk log siding every few years, as homeowners who live in log cabins made from wood do.

Some materials are both time-consuming to maintain and require harsh chemicals to clean. Brick, for example, often requires regular washing with chemical cleaners such as acids, to prevent dirt from building up and causing the brick to decay.

Unfortunately, the chemicals used to clean brick and stone exteriors often pose some risks to the user and the surrounding environment. Because acid and other cleaners contain a harsh chemical element, extreme care is often advised when using them.

“When choosing your home exterior, appearance is clearly a consideration—but don't forget to factor in upkeep expenses.”

Vinyl siding, on the other hand, which is another durable, easy-to-maintain exterior material, can be cleaned with something as simple as a garden hose—or, if you prefer, with a power washer, which can be rented for just about \$70 a day.

By selecting an exterior product that requires minimal upkeep, such as vinyl siding, you will drastically cut down the amount of time you need to spend on home exterior repair and maintenance.

Because vinyl siding can withstand the effects of rain, salt and other elements and doesn't often blister, peel, scratch, rust or fade, using it eliminates the need for frequent checks and repairs.

There are many advantages to using low-maintenance cladding options—but the perhaps most compelling reason is the reduced upkeep time exterior choices like vinyl siding require.

In today's society, homeowners lead increasingly busy lives, and free time is a valuable commodity. By selecting low-maintenance materials, homeowners gain more

time to spend doing things they love—instead of working on time-consuming exterior upkeep and repairs.

Make it personal

Whether you are building a new home or remodeling a pre-existing one, coordinated design elements—a blended mix of colors, textures and materials—will help to create customized curb appeal. .

Regardless of your budget, you can create a home that celebrates style by incorporating a mix of materials, including:

- **Windows and doors.** Windows and doors can reinforce architectural style and deliver different looks—making a home interior feel extra cozy or opening it up to expansive views of the outdoors—while at the same time making a home more energy efficient.



Windows and doors reinforce a home's style.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, heat lost through windows can comprise 10-25 percent of a home's heating bill. Using windows made of low-e glass, which feature a thin, metallic coating that lets light pass through but reflects heat waves to cool your home in summer and keep it warm in winter, can help cut your energy bills and increase your home's comfort level.

- **Siding, soffit and accessories.** Available in a wide variety of colors, vinyl siding is easy to install and requires very little maintenance. Different types of siding provide different looks; shakes, for example, can be used to cover an entire exterior or just as an accent near a gable, and are sold in finishes that resemble real wood.

Other elements, such as soffits, provide both a design touch and a valuable function. Often located near a home's eaves, soffits help protect a home from the elements. Choose soffits made from a durable material, such as aluminum, and you can avoid having to frequently repaint them.

- **Stone and brick veneer.** Because they're lighter than actual stone or brick, veneer products offer quicker installation. Made using casts made from molds of real stone, stone veneer provides an authentic stone look—with reduced transportation costs and in less time.

Similarly, homeowners who like the look of brick—but not necessarily the price—can opt for brick veneer, which comes in a variety of colors and can be made from clay or from real brick that's been thinned.

- **Designer accents.** From decorative molding to shutters to a cedar corner post, homes can be topped off with a number of exterior accent combinations for a truly customized look.

Some, like gable vents, also offer a functional use. Gable vents help get proper airflow to your attic—but can also blend well with brick, stone, wood and other exteriors.

- **Fence and rail.** The white picket fence is symbolic of the American dream home; but while they can offer a quaint look, fences can also serve a very useful purpose.

Unlike the chain link fences of yesteryear—made of wood, which required regular painting and staining, or metal, which sometimes rusted—today’s fencing options require a fraction of the upkeep.

Many modern fencing products *look* like wood, but are actually made of vinyl, so they won’t rot, fade, split or splinter. But durability is just one advantage: Vinyl fencing also offers quicker installation and reduced maintenance, as you won’t need to repaint or otherwise retouch it every couple of years.

- **Gutters and gutter protection.** Installing a securely mounted gutter system to a home will help prevent wind, snow and ice damage—and prolong the life of your home exterior by helping to keep debris out of gutter areas so that water can flow freely.

A strong rain removal system will also help prevent erosion to your home’s entryways and landscaping. Look for gutter systems that are made from heavy-duty, durable aluminum.

Putting it all together

Using products that are designed to complement each other from specific product lines and manufacturers can help create a cohesive look and feel.

However, if you feel overwhelmed by the variety of home exterior material and accent element choices on the market, don’t worry: A number of tools are available to help you visualize and plan your home’s exterior look.

Resources such as Ply Gem’s *The Designed Exterior* help homeowners select products and combinations that work together. Ply Gem also offers an online visualizer tool, *The Designed Exterior Studio*, that lets you select and test elements on a home to see how they will look.

Other Ply Gem tools, such as its New Construction Field Guide and Remodeling Field Guide, may also help you determine what overall home style you want.

To learn more about taking *The Designed Exterior*, popular home styles or Ply Gem’s exterior design tool, visit the Design Center at <http://www.plygem.com>.

About the publisher and sponsor



Headquartered in Cary, N.C., Ply Gem is a leading North American manufacturer of residential exterior building products. Ply Gem produces a comprehensive product line of vinyl siding; designer accents and skirting; vinyl fencing and vinyl and composite railing; stone veneer; vinyl windows and doors; vinyl and aluminum soffit and siding accessories; aluminum trim coil; wood and aluminum windows; and steel and fiberglass doors. Ply Gem siding brands include Mastic Home Exteriors[®], Variform[®], NAPCO[®], Ply Gem[®] Stone, Kroy[®], Cellwood[®], Georgia Pacific, Durabuilt[®], Richwood[®], Leaf Relief[®], Gutter Warrior[™] and Monticello[®] Columns. Ply Gem window and patio door brands include Ply Gem[®] Windows, Mastic[®] Replacement Windows, Ply Gem[®] Canada and Great Lakes[®] Window. Visit www.plygem.com for more information.

ProudGreenHome provides high quality, earnest, objective, useful and inspiring information. Our parent company is Sustainable Community Media. The news, information and insights created by ProudGreenHome creates an engaged online community, where the greatest efficiencies and sustainability are enjoyed by all.

Published by ProudGreenHome.com

© 2012 ProudGreenHome.com

By Erin Brereton, contributing writer